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SIPDIS

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STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CRS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR JWOOD
OSD FOR SHIVERS
CG CJTF-82, POLAD, JICCENT

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AF](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: BAGHLAN BOMBING AGGRAVATES KARZAI-QANOONI SPLIT

REF: KABUL 3774

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The November 6 Baghlan bombing, did not unite Afghans of all ethnicities in their revulsion for the insurgency and its methods. Instead it provided the latest proxy for the ongoing political contest between President Karzai and Lower House Speaker and United Front leader Mohammad Yonus Qanooni (reftel). Within a day of the atrocity, Qanooni had castigated government security services for incompetence in securing the Baghlan and national populations from terrorist attack. He demanded the immediate dismissal of several provincial officials, including the Karzai-appointed governor. Reluctant to surrender presidential prerogative on senior-level personnel management, Karzai demurred, but promised to suspend the officials pending a Ministry of Interior investigative team's report. When a parallel parliamentary investigation revealed Karzai had not executed his promise, a petulant Qanooni attempted to shut down the Lower House for the remaining month of its term. Ultimately, Karzai did opt to transfer several of the officials, but preserved presidential prerogative by acting on his Minister of Interior's recommendation, not Qanooni's insistence. MPs, discomfited by the prospect of a constitutional crisis, and the possible loss of their own parliamentary pay and privileges, pressured Qanooni to abandon his walkout. The Karzai-Qanooni power struggle will likely deepen as the country moves towards the 2009 presidential elections. END SUMMARY

Step by Step from Tragedy to Political Farce

12. (SBU) Qanooni acted quickly to exploit the Baghlan bombing for political advantage in his ongoing struggle with Karzai. Two days after the attack, he commissioned a parliamentary inquiry, implying the unreliability of the Ministry of Interior investigation already under way. He also orchestrated a parliamentary request that the president dismiss seven provincial officials, including the Karzai-appointed Baghlan governor, on grounds of incompetence or even possible complicity in the attack. Though this request lacked constitutional justification, Qanooni's office argued that parliament's role as the representative of Afghanistan's people gave it a right to encroach upon the

president's senior-level personnel management prerogative. When Karzai demurred, Qanooni claimed that the president was defying the will of the people. In a November 15 press conference, Karzai appeared to yield by agreeing to suspend the seven Baghlan officials pending the Ministry of Interior investigating team's report.

¶3. (SBU) Returning to Kabul November 26, neither team was able identify the perpetrators; both focused on the provincial government's failure to forestall the attack. Parliament's team revealed that Karzai had not acted on his promise to suspend the seven Baghlan officials, and alleged that those same officials had obstructed the investigations. Qanooni declared Karzai's failure to suspend the officials an insult to parliament and called for a suspension of Lower House sessions for the remaining month of its term.

Qanooni's House Divided

¶4. (SBU) United Front MPs departed the chamber en masse, asserting that, if Karzai continued to flout parliament's will, its work would be meaningless. Karzai supporters remained and made statements to the press denouncing Qanooni's departure as illegal. Independent MPs, however, discomfited by the prospect of a constitutional crisis, which might cost them their incomes and privileges, sent delegations to Qanooni's office in an effort to get the speaker to relent. Later, they arranged a meeting between Qanooni and Karzai.

¶5. (SBU) Qanooni told Karzai he would not reconvene

KABUL 00004153 002 OF 002

parliament until the president fired the seven Baghlan officials. Qanooni attempted to goad Karzai by implying that his refusal to dismiss the officials was merely an effort to conceal his own government's incompetence. Qanooni's strategic goal was likely to establish a precedent for parliamentary review of presidential personnel actions.

Situation Defused

¶6. (SBU) Over the next few days, senior government officials reacted to Qanooni's verbal offensive by, rather artfully, diffusing possible blame for the bombing across several offices and levels of government. Interior Minister Zerar Ahmad Muqbel said November 27, "the incident occurred due to the negligence of the provincial officials from top to bottom, as well as officials in (Farouk Wardak's) Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs." He added, "the officials who have neglected the orders of the government need to be either fired, transferred, or prosecuted." In a private meeting with Qanooni on the same day, Karzai said he would consider suspending, dismissing, transferring or prosecuting nine Baghlan officials; however, he would be acting on the recommendation of his minister of interior, not Qanooni's insistence. Qanooni declared victory, but without establishing precedent for parliamentary review of the president's personnel actions.

It Will Likely Get Worse

¶7. (SBU) The Karzai-Qanooni power struggle will likely deepen as the country moves towards the 2009 presidential elections. Nevertheless, it may constructively serve to turn the theory of the constitution into the practical procedures and protocols that will define the relative limits of presidential and parliamentary power.

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